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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3612

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV TD

SUBJECT: T&T FM GIFT RESIGNS

¶1. Foreign Minister Knowlson Gift has submitted his resignation to Prime Minister Patrick Manning who has accepted it. In a September 25 letter to the Prime Minister, delivered the day before Manning departed for Washington, Gift said that, under his watch, "the visibility and respectability of our country reached a level of preeminence unsurpassed" and that "there is not a single foreign policy initiative or priority mandated by your goodself that was not successfully accomplished". In a possible reference to unspecified policy differences which may have triggered the resignation, Gift said: "my conscience is clear in respect of performance expectations from any minister of Foreign Affairs".

¶2. News of PM Manning's dissatisfaction with his old friend Gift's performance was no longer kept secret. The latest in a long line of rumors about Gift's possible resignation began to circulate as soon as it became clear that he would not be representing T&T during the general debate of the 61st UN General Assembly in New York. From that point on, the discussion among observers centered on what policy differences might have motivated Gift's resignation. Two possible such differences with Manning that have been floated concern Manning's recent allegation that the US has neglected the Caribbean region and T&T's decision to join its Caricom partners in support of Venezuela's candidacy for the Latin American and Caribbean seat on the security council. However, during a September 27 visit to the consulate to obtain a tourist visa, Gift declined to divulge the motive for his resignation, saying only that "the reasons will eventually come out". Gift's cabinet colleagues, too, are mum. We have been told by MFA Chief of Protocol that a replacement will be named tomorrow, Friday September 29.

¶3. COMMENT: We do not expect any substantive change in T&T foreign policy as a result of Gift's resignation, since T&T's foreign relations are tightly controlled by Prime Minister Manning, as is the overall direction of all GOTM ministries. END COMMENT.

AUSTIN